DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 072 414 CS 000 329

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TITLE An Eclectic Approach to Training.
PUB DATE 71
NOTE 11p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Reading Assn. (16th, Atlantic City, April 1971)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS Individualized Reading; Reading Improvement; *Reading Instruction; *Remedial Reading; *Remedial Reading Programs; *Teacher Education; *Teaching Models

ABSTRACT

This paper first presents the rationale for an eclectic approach to remedial teaching and then considers a teacher training program designed to encourage eclecticism. The wide range of pupil characteristics, teacher attributes, and instructional approaches and the lack of any universal cure for reading problems necessitates an eclectic approach in order to establish the flexibility required for effective remediation. The training program suggested by the author is based on a broad background of knowledge and includes a variety of field work experiences. He also briefly describes a similar program in operation at the University of Wisconsin. (TO)

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AN ECLECTIC APPROACH TO TRAINING

A vast range of pupil characteristics, teacher attributes, and instructional approaches is both readily observable in the schools and frequently demonstrated in the literature. The position taken in this paper is that recognition of this diversity must be reflected in training programs for remedial teachers if the trainees are ever to cope successfully with their own strengths and limitations as well as their pupils' idiosyncrasies in selecting and/or devising viable approaches to remedial instruction. Because teachers' attributes and childrens' problems differ and because we have not--and, in my opinion, will not in the foreseeable future--discovered any universal cures for reading problems, we must take an eclectic approach to training in order to establish the flexibility that is required by the facts of life.

Frieder (1970, p. 29) got it all together when he said this: "Many alternatives are currently available to the prescriber in the area of media and strategies; but despite the advances in diagnosis

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and instruction, research has provided little concrete information about the prescriber's task--putting diagnosis and instruction together to reach objectives." I suppose a cynic might say that if we don't really know what we're doing the only thing we can do is take an eclectic approach. But I prefer to "accentuate the positive" even though we may be unable to "eliminate the negative." In another context (Otto, McMenemy and Smith, in press), we put it this way: "We doubt that research-based knowledge relative to the systematic matching of pupils and materials/methods is forthcoming in the foreseeable future. . . . teachers will need to continue to make judgments regarding the instruction of individual pupils. Such judgments will best be made by sensitive teachers with clear perceptions of pupils' needs, explicit objectives, and knowledge of a wide range of methods and materials."

Actually, I doubt whether we can do much to make anybody sensitive; but I do not doubt that we can help teachers-in-training to recognize diversity, to accept limitations, to establish objectives, to become familiar with a wide range of methods and materials, to question pat answers, and, ultimately, to take an eclectic, problem solving approach to remedial teaching. "Eclectic", in my dictionary, means "...not following any one system...but selecting and using what are considered the best elements of all systems." That is the approach I would like to see after the training program is completed, for we have no evidence whatever to support any single system to the exclusion of all others. But I feel certain that if we want teachers to be in a position to take a creative, problem solving approach to each case they encounter, then we must devise training programs that encourage such behavior

as well as supply the basic knowledge required.

Now, with the basic position stated, let us first consider a bit further the rationale for an eclectic approach to remedial teaching; and then let us consider a training program designed to encourage eclecticism.

Rationale

In my opinion, the only rationale we need for an eclectic approach is inherent in a series of quotations I'd like to share with you.

William James (1904) put it this way more than half a century ago: "The art of teaching grew up in the classroom, out of inventiveness and sympathetic concrete observation. Even where...the advancer of the art was also a psychologist, the pedagogics and the psychology ran side by side, and the former was not derived in any sense from the latter. The two were congruent, but neither was subordinate. And so everywhere the teaching must agree with the psychology, but need not necessarily be the only kind of teaching that would so agree; for many diverse methods of teaching may equally well agree with psychological laws." That, it seems to me, is a clear invitation to eclecticism. Not hit-or-miss eclecticism, mind you; but eclecticism based on diverse knowledge.

In her excellent article on individual differences for the fourth edition of the Encyclopedia of Educational Research, Leona Tyler made this observation: "...it is psychological individuality which is of the greatest importance to education. Each student in a classroom,

no matter how carefully selected as a member of a 'homogeneous' group, will of necessity react in his own unique way to the situation. There are differences in talents and aptitudes, in interests and motives, in habits and response styles, in emotional needs and vulnerabilities. In education as in medicine, there is really no 'norm'. When a teacher makes an assignment to a class of 30, it is actually 30 different assignments that are carried out." To this most of the teachers I know--including those who have never made a differentiated assignment in their lives--would heartily agree. The message is very clear: No single approach or focus is likely to be adequate to deal with the vast range of individual differences in any school situation.

The latter point was also made, and made quite vigorously by, Bracht (1970): "Bloom... Chronbach... Gagné... Glaser... Jensen... and other educational psychologists have suggested that no single instructional process provides optimal learning for all students. Given a common set of objectives, some students will be more successful with one instructional program and other students will be more successful with an alternative instructional program. Consequently, a greater proportion of students will attain the instructional objectives when instruction is differentiated for different types of students."

Bracht made his statement in a recent Review of Educational Research article on experimental factors related to aptitude-treatment interactions. "The goal of research on ATI (aptitude-treatment interactions)," he said, "is to find significant disordinal interactions between alternative treatments and personological variables, i.e.,

to develop alternative instructional programs so that optimal educational pay-off is obtained when students are assigned differently to alternative programs." Such research would--hopefully and ultimately--serve to provide guidelines for the systematic matching of pupils and treatments. To the present time, however, the surface has barely been scratched. Until the scratch has been deepened considerably--and, for that matter, to get on with the task of identifying viable alternatives to be researched--we are well advised to maintain a repertoire of treatment options to be employed as they appear appropriate. And the name of the game is eclecticism. Not hit-or-miss, trial-and-error fumbling, but careful selection of the treatment that appears to be most appropriate for a given pupil at a given point in time.

The selection of treatments for pupils is what Harris (1970) is talking about in the introduction to his Casebook on Reading Disability. Referring to the cases in the book, he says: "A combination of teaching methods was used with most of these children, teaching visual recognition of common words while also teaching phonics, and devoting part of the lesson to oral and silent reading. The Gillingham method of phonics instruction was followed in Cases 4, 14 and 16, and was sometimes combined with kinesthetic procedures (Case 10). The Fernald kinesthetic or VAKT method was employed in several of the cases, usually with some modification. For example, in Case 2 the child's lack of fine motor control made writing difficult, so typing was substituted. A language experience approach utilizing the child's own dictation was employed at the beginning in several cases, at times combined with

reading of easy printed material." (p. xxiv) And he goes on, but I think the point that careful case studies are likely to be the basis for a variety of approaches is adequately made. And, again, eclecticism is the name of the game.

If I am belaboring the obvious, I apologize. The point is very simply that the rationale for an eclectic approach to both teaching and teacher training is implicit in what people who have considered the diversity in pupils and in teaching have had to say.

A Training Program

What, then, does all this have to say about the training of remedial teachers? To me, the message--if not the means--is very clear: The training program should be based on a broad background of knowledge and it should include a variety of practicum experiences.

Zedler (1970) was not talking exclusively about remedial reading teachers, but her points are relevant here: "...the training for teachers of children who cannot learn by conventional procedures should not be a superimposed program, but should begin at the undergraduate level and proceed through a fifth year. The goal should be prevention rather than remediation; therefore, the teachers should be prepared to teach at the kindergarten and primary grade levels. Student-teachers should first acquire a broad eclectic background of knowledge from which they can develop frameworks for understanding: a) children who learn normally and those who do not, b) the nature of language, c) the process of learning itself, and d) the pathologies of language and learning. Out of such knowledge student-teachers

should develop skills: a) in evaluating learning abilities; b) in regular, diagnostic, and therapeutic teaching; c) in relating to and strengthening the self-concepts of children with learning problems; and d) in communicating with related professions; and e) in evaluating and participating in high quality research. During the development of these specific skills student-teachers should be skillfully supervised by college and university professors with high degrees of competence in the areas they supervise."

Zedler's statement, in my opinion, gets it all together regarding the need for an eclectic knowledge base. To her statement I would add my belief that realistic, meaningful practicum experiences are most likely to take place in a school setting. Braam and Oliver (1970) have pointed out their feeling that a field experience for undergraduates in an elementary level reading course "...has contributed to a bridging of the gap between ivory tower and classroom." (p. 428) The need for bridging the credibility gap is even greater in graduate courses in remedial reading. Furthermore, I believe that the confrontation of real-world problems in a real-world setting helps to engender an independent, problem-solving approach to remedial teaching. And once again the name of the game is eclecticism!

With apologies for being provincial, I would like to describe very briefly a couple of things that we do at the University of Wisconsin--Madison to provide realistic, eclectic field work experiences in a school setting. These efforts are possible only because we have the cooperation and support of personnel in the Madison

Public Schools. The description is excerpted from an article by Otto and Smith (in press).

"During the regular school year students in the university remedial reading course are able to work with elementary level pupils in the public schools within the framework of a school-university cooperative tutoring program. Of the three weekly course-contact hours, students spend two in a lecture-discussion session and one working with a child with moderate reading problems in the public schools. Thus, the students have an opportunity to become familiar with the techniques of assessment and remedial teaching in a naturalistic setting. They are required to prepare a written case report, which includes a tentative diagnosis, a prognostic statement in which they predict the rate and degree of progress that might realistically be expected in view of the facts in the case, and a proposed plan for continued instruction.

. . . A central office reading consultant coordinates the public school aspect of the program. She presents the program to the building principals, identifies the schools that will participate, and gives the university students an overview of the reading program in the public schools. Students are assigned only to schools that have the services of a reading resource teacher. . . . The reading resource teacher selects the child to be tutored, makes arrangements for the sessions, and generally guides the university student in selecting and using tests and materials. In most instances the weekly hour of tutoring is done in two half-hour sessions.

The remedial reading practicum that is offered during the regular school year is also tied to the public school program. Whereas the

tutoring program is conceived mainly as a familiarization experience for university students, the practicum is conceived as an intensive, closely supervised experience. Therefore, to permit adequate supervision most of the students during any given semester are placed in a single school designated the 'practicum school.' . . . each student works with one or two pupils with severe reading problems and gains experience in diagnosis, remedial teaching and case reporting. The case report is, of course, passed on to the classroom teacher, who cooperates with the student in coordinating the remedial instruction with classroom instruction throughout the semester of practicum work.

The university practicum instructor has direct responsibility for supervision of the students; and the 'practicum school' has a Title I supported remedial reading teacher, who is available as a resource person on a day-to-day basis. The remedial teacher works with pupils from Grades 1-3 and the practicum students work with pupils from Grades 4-6, so there is a sharing of responsibilities for pupils who need remedial help. A reading consultant from the public school's central office staff makes regular visits to observe and supervise the school's overall remedial program. Diagnostic materials are supplied to the practicum students by the university, but most of the teaching materials are supplied by the school.

The university also offers a course titled Field Work in School Reading Programs during the regular school year. It differs from the practicum mainly in the fact that the focus is upon a school's overall reading program rather than upon individual pupils with problems in reading. The intent is to provide relevant field experience for

students, usually at the post-master's level, who aspire to become reading consultants."

In the several aspects of the cooperative school-university program, our students see a wide variety of problems in a variety of settings. We encourage them to see also the wide variety of resources available and the variety of approaches that can be taken. Flip Wilson says that "what you see is what you get!" In this case, what you get is eclectic.

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